

title: **Archaic Modernism**

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Catalogue n°: AR P.02

Delivered to Heavy Music Artwork (Sevenoaks) on August 2020, first edition published on September 2020, last revision carried out in December 2021.

Archaic Modernism is the second monographic retrospective dedicated to Christophe Spzajdel. Back in 2018 Spzajdel commissioned Archaeological Records to cure the biography, critic essay and logo selection for his new anthology of logos. Together with the author we decided to narrate his most recent production – the body of work made after the release of the book 'Lord of the Logos' (Gestalten, 2010) – as an evolution of his original Depresiv'Moderne and Winterstijl calligraphic styles in the one named Archaic Modernism. Archaic Modernism is an ideal synthesis of his career as graphic designer.

Christophe Spzajdel is one of the music industry's most prolific and renowned logo designers. He is the artist who first created the indecipherable logos of heavy metal bands by letting the tendrils of the letters grow like wildly proliferating organic tissue. Like new flesh.

Spzajdel designed a philosophical triangle that he uses as an existential seal. He got it printed on an A4 sheet of paper and nailed it on the wall at his desk, right above his head. The three corners of the triangle represent nature, art and travel.

According to John Zerzan art is always about 'something hidden'. Instead of helping us connect with something, it moves us away from it. We perceive the intrinsic characteristics of nature in this way. Only the gifted seems to get closer to understanding the enigmas nature holds. One of them is Christophe Spzajdel.

Spzajdel is a solitary explorer always on the move. Born in Belgium in 1970, he began to observe the world through the perspective of someone immersed in a natural environment, the woods of Wallonia. He continuously trained his gaze on the countryside, forcing his eye to follow the patterns of the intertwining roots and branches and the flights of creatures in the atmosphere. His artistic motivation had been fostered during his loner childhood and the unfulfilled desire to attend art studies. He graduated in September 1996 with a degree in forest engineering from the Departement des Eaux et Forêts, Faculté des Sciences Agronomiques, Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve. Profoundly curious, Christophe

developed a way to live a travelling lifestyle, moving about in the true essence of his triangle (with Exeter, England as his basecamp since 2006).

Since the early 1990s, Christophe has defined the visual identities of metal bands with his unique typographical stylings. He has been heavily involved in the black metal genre: a music scene that draws inspiration from nature and its fundamental laws more than other styles.

He has always lived a life of pure vision. Despite being so free and lonesome, his focus on logo branding has established himself as a much sought-after figure in many music scenes. He has created a tangible link between artists and their audiences by forming relatable double-bonds. That is why Christophe is the master of artistic identity. He is not alone while walking through his desolate landscape.

Hunter Hunt-Hendrix (Liturgy's vocalist), also pins philosophical triangles in his room. The connection between nature, art and self-obsession strongly ruminates in his mind as well. Hunt-Hendrix was in constant pain, suffering massive levels of anxiety and paranoia, struggling against suicidal ideation. The problem also had to do with something more universal; the primordial wound; the disjointed characteristics of humanity—the bondage of isolation, self-obsession, and disconnection. Notably, the void of contemporary horror experienced by those of us unable to integrate into a community with a collective spirituality affected him strongly.

John Zerzan criticised Gilles Deleuze for being too pessimistic when accepting the disconnection of humanity from nature. But Hunt-Hendrix's pain is real, as is Szpajdel's obsession with graphical expression. They are both constructed reactions to isolation and disconnection. The idea of nature is a seed that is salvageable and can germinate in the most challenging conditions.

What motivated writing a book about Szpajdel? There is already the cult book 'Lord of the Logos' (Gestalten 2010), self-authored by Szpajdel, illustrating his work, but there is a positive message to be told from his personal story that needs to be exposed. The story of a nomadic artist who has carried the idea of a darkly radiant nature through three decades now.

Christophe has released numerous interviews since the mid-1990s. While there is an abundance of usable material that could construct his biography, the content would not truly express the actual depth of his mind and creativity. Instead of repeating the same technical debate of graphic designers in the metal scene, one should dig deeper and peel away the layers of his character to reveal an authentic portrait. By using unconventional methods such as cut-ups or dissecting old interviews to pose new questions, one can understand how the inner workings of his mind create a lens which can help us see and absorb the contemporary.

Christophe's biography is full of moments that highlight the difficulty of integrating but finally culminates in an optimistic ending in which he frees himself from the bondage of society through abstract thought. While for Hunt-Hendrix, creating a band to use music to transcend the abyss was the ultimate catharsis to alleviate the pain, Szpajdel adopts exploration and a sense of wonder to escape from societal expectations.

This critical text, edited by 'Archaeological Records', creates a collage of material, mostly collected from the artist's archive, to bring out a sharper image of the 'Lord of the Logos' and his influence on the social history of contemporary art.

1.1 LIGNE CLAIRE DNA

Suppose we can define the Belgian comics artist André Franquin by his character Gaston Lagaffe, as if one were the other's phenotype. Or think about when Hergé (pen name for Belgian cartoonist Georges Prosper Remi) used to say *Tintin is me*. There is an immediacy, an immediate identification, a relationship of mutual creation, between a designer and his stylized figures in clear line. The basic idea of this chaotic biography of the Belgian artist Christophe Szpajdel is that there is a relationship between the influence that the clear line has had on him and the history of the logotype in musical subcultures.

We can say Christophe Szpajdel is the embodiment of heavy metal branding.

Christophe Szpajdel was born on the 29th of September 1970 in Gembloux, Belgium and was the first of two sons. Despite the decline of coal mining in the late 1960s, the grassy landscapes of towns like Gembloux had the signatures of the industry's lustrous but dark stacks along avenues and railways. With the bleakness of the impending economic crises, it was evident that Western Europe was entering tense years. In 1973, OPEC raised the global oil price by 400%, WWA Records Released Black Sabbath's 'Sabbath Bloody Sabbath', and Christophe began drawing. He remembers starting to draw at the age of three. He often remembers that he already had a passion for drawing animals, trees and landscapes that surrounded me with a great perception of the details.

Considering that recalling memories is a brain activity that begins at about two-and-a-half years old, this is probably one of Szpajdel's earliest and the most important; especially considering the selective nature of memories. Andrea Pazienza designed his first character, a bear, at the age of one-and-a-half years old. The early tendency toward graphic expression is a precursor of talent that will eventually manifest

itself. Similarly Szpajdel managed to draw his first praying mantis at the age of three, and according to his mother he was quite proud of it when he finished it.

When we started working on his biography Christophe sent us many interviews to consult. We were immediately verified that the answers, real rivers of experiences and opinions, had not been edited: they were not the published version of the interviews but his raw answers. Lists of anecdotes that are mixed with lists of artists, records and places, returning an overall vision that is his biography. Because the biography of a logo artist can only be a fragmented narration.

He recalls: *I had elementary teaching from my father, who was excellent in technical-scientific drawing, as he was an engineer by career. I had a pronounced passion for drawing wildlife rather than cars, planes, buildings and technology. It is watching the wildlife that triggered my lust for drawing what I saw. I had a real passion for drawing invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles and birds. I enjoyed drawing while on the field, and this is how I managed to improve my eye in observing and then drawing.*

Szpajdel remembers immediately and instinctively sketching his visions. They would evolve as he recollected his memories in tranquillity. He still adopts this method with the help of a digital camera. He attended the Institut Saint Jean Baptiste in Wavre, Belgium for both primary and secondary schools. Like most Belgian children, he was an avid comic books reader.

I loved Tintin, as he formed my youth, I also adored Franquin, and Gaston Lagaffe is an idol.

Art has to do with something hidden. The blur of rapid movement or a pitch-black background can conjure visions of emptiness, space for the reader's imagination. Hergé's linearity and cleanliness accentuate the underlying tension when the action comes. Hergé, who exhibited a reverence toward Lagaffe, particularly admired the nervousness that gave life to the ligne claire style. Among Hergé's ways of emphasising climactic twists in the dreamy storylines of children's minds, there are explosions and barrels framed by the darkness that forms onomatopoeic logos. Contrasts of the clear line, Dadaist echoes and modernisms.

The darkness around Hergé's explosions, an imaginative space, is the same dark space that frames the posters painted by Freddy Conrad that were promoted by the Belgian Ministry of Communication in the 1950s. These posters, stylising colourful cities, are surrounded by dark, abstract space, like the dark voids of a room or a cave. It is a human perspective, the subjective point-of-view of the designer, whose intention is to create a bond between characters and the audience that they can identify with a link between themselves and the world.

And this is what designing a logo achieves when creating an identity. It chains the subject to the product and lets the observer be possessed by design.

The land where Szpajdel was born is one of the focal points in the history of graphic design. Everything speaks to him in the language of visual communication. As a kid with a passion for drawing, he observed things with a perspective influenced by experimental psychologist Joseph Delboeuf's optical illusions; visualising shapes bigger than they are.

1.2 ENTERING THE MUSIC

As he often recalls, since his early childhood, he was attracted by the colors of the twilight, and later by the darkened mountains surrounded by amazing auras of clouds. Those landscapes were promises of mystery and adventure.

The ease with which Christophe Szpajdel, when doing interviews, correlates mystery with uncontaminated landscapes is worth attention. Using abstract theory and practise to romanticise the world is not a natural process that we use to visualise environments. This skill is inherent in a gifted few; a trait that unites designers and musicians — the ability to create meaningful spaces from nothing.

In his early childhood, Christophe found in music another embodiment of his feelings: *when I was seven, the whole rock and metal scene was in its early stages of development and the most extreme bands of these times were Kiss and Black Sabbath. Both bands felt directly in my eyes and my ears. I found aesthetically and visually that dark metal scene fascinating.*

He had a connection between music and visual communication. Like when his young eyes were attracted to details caught from the stream of television, a fascination that could even emerge despite the mainstream dialogue around him. A dark charm induced by the perception of a primordial and spontaneous force radiating magnificence and freedom. From the bushes of Wallonia, which he explored with increasing frequency, to the cartoonish dark woods of 'Red Sonja'. Toward a forest hidden inside another forest.

Christophe exits childhood with the strength and the originality of his interests and, thanks to his curiosity, refined musical tastes.

When thirteen he was into Greek traditional music, and those were the days when Hawkweed or Black Sabbath reached his years too. But it would have been only in the mid-1980s that he could find out about Venom, Iron maiden, Judas Priest or Slayer.

Often, in interviews, Christophe enriches his answers with lists. Evocative lists, always describing a polytheistic group that protects his personal history and that defines the origin of his fascination in

calligraphy: in the mid-1980s, I got acquainted with darker and more extreme forms of metal and bands like Venom, Mercyful Fate, Celtic Frost, Slayer, Sodom, Possessed, Metallica, Judas Priest, Iron Maiden, Helloween, Kreator, Protector, Destruction, Infernal Majesty, Sepultura, Sarcófago, Necrodeath, Necrovore ... These bands' music was the starting point of making scary letterings. These bands triggered my imagination for logos.

Singing to oneself, listening through headphones, first tracing and copying and then improvising, are practices of sensitive digestion. Like when you dream, when you metabolise what you have just experienced; shaping it into images that are at the same time surprising and familiar. For a designer, the awareness of his cultural environment of references emerges with the practice of calligraphy. The dark landscapes, together with the horror aesthetic, already conveyed by early hard rock, guided him towards the cultural niche of heavy metal graphics. This narrative is how to summarise Christophe's pre-adolescence. Recreating those signs for your own, and finally starting to improvise to discover yourself.

When I was a teenage kid ...I used to draw skulls, cemeteries with a full- moon night, trees (mostly without leaves), eerie castle silhouettes at night. I still have these folders somewhere in the attic unless my parents have thrown them away. In my school, I was one of the very few to enjoy metal at that time, so other pupils pointed at me with the finger. I was pretty special, different from anybody else.

I already liked to venture into unknown habitats. I also remember chasing insects in the school backyard during the class breaks and sharing my interests with the rest of my schoolmates who didn't care about it. I remember disappearing in nature and found observing microcosm fauna of ponds.

Christophe often describes his daily life in the old days as lonely but overflowing with discoveries and memories and visions. All things that found a place in his notebooks would always re-emerge in his work.

Instead of doing it in my school-books ...I quickly understood that and started doing drawings in a separate sketchbook and keeping them discreetly under my table would save me from lots of trouble. However, I got caught, and on several occasions, the teacher shamed me by showing my doodles to the entire class, causing an embarrassing laugh. Something much worse than going to the principal, I was singled out by other pupils and bullied for my 'tastes' for the devil and creepy crawlies, as this kind of music, metal, hard rock was a conveyor of such messages.

Drawing things influenced by the infinite forms of nature and heavy metal resonated the most. The former giving him motivation and concepts, the latter, through the styles of the subcultures that he participated in, would provide him with technique and form. In random combination.

In these times, I satisfied myself by redrawing logos of Venom, Celtic Frost, Helloween, on paper but also the wall of the toilets of my school.

Teenagers drawing skulls with pointing fingers and laughing at them is a contemporary standard that Szpajdel illustrated first. A practice that is certainly common to many. Compulsive hacking on desks, chairs, diaries, which seemed to find its niche with a heavy metal enthusiast. But even if these black sheep were a minority, summed together through the years, they could later become a legion.

1.3 CORES

For Christophe Szpajdel, drawing has always been a vital activity, like eating, which he calls “my fix”. *I need my fix*, alluding, with a fleeting smile, to the addicts’ slang. It is the phrase he repeats when sitting at the table, be it a café or a train, at any break of the day. He opens the pad, pulls a pencil out of his breast pocket, and, while eating or conversing, resumes producing studies on a logo that is about to be born. A continuous training that brings him closer to the object of his curiosity, and a practice that is satisfying, just like any other form of meditation.

At the beginning of adolescence, it was clear that logos were the ideal matrix for expressing his abstract thought.

Some logos I do remember, and I loved straight from the outset are bands like Necrovore, Hellpreacher, Sepultura, Sarcófago, Holosade, Dark Angel due to their memorable design... I started getting a fix by drawing and redrawing logos.

I started logos back in 1985.

Art was my strongest point in school, alongside biology and languages.

Despite the skulls engraved on benches, the teachers were able to recognise the talent of Szpajdel, who excelled in art classes. The developed sensitivity and understanding of his perception made him appear less similar to his peers. This uniqueness itself was a characteristic of the formation and manifestation of his identity as an artist.

The mixing of different visions, like natural landscapes and social contexts, together with a marked melancholic eye, was perfectly expressed by a series of moth logos. Drawings inspired by the shapes of insects with big wings, which evolved to such an extent that Szpajdel created an entire sub-genre of logo design.

I took a specialised course of entomology.

Moth logos are being created as I have been into entomology since my childhood. Differently than my schoolmates, I was not interested in usual things like cars, toys, football, games but I was a solitary creature passionate about insects. That difference caused me to be rejected and left alone in my corner during the breaks, and I have followed that path.

He had a chronic passion for nature, forests, trees, birds, reptiles and insects, and this is the reason why a lot of the logos he does involve insect forms. He deeply loved nature, enjoyed trips in forests and meadows where insects were abounding. That passion persisted.

Thanks to his perseverance in cultivating his interests and desires for exploration, the first few years of university gave him the opportunities to practice together with his peers.

In early 1989 he was dwelling in Brussels, frequenting vinyl record stores on daily basis. Discomania and Music Mania were his favorite stop, where he would immerse in cover arts, and eventually buy second-hand treasures. During one of these afternoons he got a Septicore Zine flyer, made by Thierry Prince himself. Prince lived in Limal, close to Ottignies Louvain-la-Neuve: they shared the same territory, and a meeting was only a matter of time. And like-minded people who come together in their territory determine the birth of a scene. But other conditions were also placed in an ideal position, as one of Thierry Prince's friends and long time collaborator, Marcel Van Meersche, was about to abandon the Septicore team.

Limal, Belgium, is a tiny village but a vibrant spot as it was also the home of 'Hellraisers', another cult series of tapes. By meeting Thierry "Necrovomit" Prince, who was also releasing the 'Morbid Noise' compilations, Szpajdel officially stepped out of his dark corner. Prince had good contacts and was able to print new issues cheaply, only having to cover the costs of paper and printing ink, thus determining the idea conditions for a fanzine.

Producing a fanzine was a way to push the creative energy accumulated in bedrooms to the public arena, from a passive hobby to a full-on, active passion for bands. Creating lists of groups and then connecting the dots and channelling people, established scenes.

Septicore's third issue was in the making when Szpajdel joined in. When we asked why they let him in he answered that part of the reason lies in the collection of tapes he had build up already: his encyclopedic knowledge of underground metal was already formed, and this is always a key that opens the door to any teenager's secret kingdom. He was determined to get involved in the determination of scenes because he genuinely wanted to support young bands. When thinking about that period, also the time of his first assignments, he recalls groups like Apparition who didn't have a proper logo and his will

to do professional logo designs for such bands. It was the time when bands had a problem finding their real identity, and therefore a perfect time to be an artist who wanted to devote himself to branding.

Szapajdel was passionate about defining the identities of bands, and he wanted to offer them his skills. Branding was his passion, even if he didn't even understand what marketing could mean. His early idea of branding consisted of characterizing the name of a band with a graphic identity. With many naive artists, the artistic style, designed to create a bond between a craftsman and the object, was essential. To trace the vital breath that transforms the material is a self-referencing aesthetic that is simple and effective such as the stroke of a marker.

Just half a century before, Art Nouveau was still a valid response to the problem of inorganic and depersonalized goods and urban spaces by applying the aesthetic of the natural form to the needs of modern life. While practising a non-consumer lifestyle of DIY beyond the large production lines, Szpajdel sensed that Victor Pierre Horta's (Belgian Art Nouveau architect and designer) teachings were perfectly valid. On the other hand, Szpajdel was born into it and found the form harmonized in even the dirty coal stacks. It was thanks to Art Nouveau architecture that he was becoming aware of his natural aesthetic.

With the mass production of goods for the famous Liberty department store in London, objects needed to portray a natural form despite the absence of hand-workmanship. A vital, distinctive characteristic for logo branding was required, even at the cost of sacrificing legibility of texts and styles. In the death metal and black metal communities of the 1980s (incredibly, just half a century after Art Nouveau), illegibility would have been a desired distinctive feature. Artists like Szpajdel would have affirmed the putrefaction of the logos as the graphic style associated with genres of music equally putrefied. Collaborating with Septicore finally presented the possibility of experimenting with original logos.

My first logograms were done for the 'Morbid Noise' compilation tape 'Morbid Death' (pre-Blasphereion who later became Sabathan, and Cernunnos – whose members then started Enthroned). As well as Morbid God (pre-Moonspell) and Filii Nigrantium Infernaliaum, as I was in touch with Tetragrammaton and Belathauzer.

Communicating with many people within the niche scene attracted a lot of international interest and correspondence. This communication was an activity that strengthened Szpajdel's love for languages and his fascination for travelling. Despite his early cultural isolation, Szpajdel has always been strongly motivated to communicate. It was precisely the scattered nature of the scenes that made him become a polyglot. He speaks French, Walloon, German, Polish, English and Portuguese.

He also speaks Spanish and Italian very well and chews through Russian, Greek and Swedish. Language is not a barrier to Szpajdel; their alphabets, combinations and infinite distortions are not a mystery to him.

Language learning also occurred during the discovery of the metal world. He used to write a lot of letters, sending stamps with them in order to stimulate the dialogue. To him the best was to write to Latin America: he learnt Portuguese to interact with the Brazilian local scenes, or Spanish to get in touch with the Chilean scene (he was corresponding with band members of bands like Atomic Aggressor, Bloody Cross), bands from Colombia like Masacre, Pirokinesis, Reencarnación. He tape-traded Sarcófago, Genocidio and Tharithimas cassettes with Gildo Morbid Ripper in Brazil, or Sadism releases with Juan Bascur and Fernando Barata Bustios from Ocultismo Zine from Chile. Back then tape-trading was the only way to get to know a particular scene as an insider.

Travelling, the third corner of his philosophical triangle, together with art and nature, was what Christophe wanted most at the end of high school. While his brother expatriated to and settled in, Japan, he was beginning to imagine the spread of death metal throughout the world. First came Europe to experience the birth of the black metal phenomenon. Discovering the world following the evolution of the music scene was possible because of his curiosity. And also because of its esoteric yet accessible nature. Like the hole of the white rabbit that Alice in Wonderland finds in the backyard.

The documentary 'Black Metal' by Marilyn Watelet (produced by the French Centre du Cinéma and Audio Visuel de la Communauté de Belgique in 1998) chose to portray the black metal scene in suburban Belgium. This setting was because it was considered a social landscape where nothing ever changes and would be a sample of an environment where a cultural explosion would reverberate for years to come. It happened with heavy metal (and techno) ten years before, and the reaction was still going on by the time black metal had emerged. The contrast between the red brick single-family houses and the colours of any of the extreme music scenes that rose from the peaceful provinces of Western Europe is so well-balanced that they seemed picturesque. A similar feeling that one would have with the photographic portraits of Peter Beste's 'True Norwegian Black Metal' series or Rineke Dijkstra (Dutch photographer) whose colours and fetishes express the same need for personal abysses through different tangents.

It was in the mid-1980s that I discovered bands like Venom, Slayer, Sentinel Beast, Kreator, Voivod, Cyclone, Magnum, that fascinated me even more. That had also been a brand-new approach to darker and more extreme sounds. Black metal started in the early 1980s with Venom, but the forefathers of black metal are Black Sabbath. I must insist that black metal would not have been the same if not initiated by the bands aforementioned.

Emphasizing the importance of the origins of black metal derives from the need to define one's own historical space. It is living within the scene that we can view ourselves. The spatiotemporal coordinates

of the territory one must deal with by measuring one's time as it flows is not an easy task, even when the reference points are not missing.

Other amazing contributors in the black metal scene that lots of people ignore are Black Rose (pre-Mercyful Fate/King Diamond), Bathory, Necrovore, Hellpreacher, Bloody Cross, Death Yell, Black Angel (Peru), Sarcófago, Root (Czech Republic), Torr (Czech Republic), Bulldozer (Italy), Death SS (Italy), Mortuary Drape (Italy), Necrodeath (Italy), Poison (Germany) and a few more before the arrival of Norsecore. You might notice that real black metal bands did include guitar solos and a more emphasised rhythm section like for example Black Shepherd, Ancient Rites, Enthroned, Typhoon to mention early black metal bands from Belgium.

In 1987, I even needed to immerse myself into more obscure stuff. I started ordering demos; going to underground gigs.

One of the most potent fetishes is the musical medium; a multi-dimensional artefact that can immediately give a history of a band, a situation, a period. Like the 12-inch DJ-only white label did for dance music, in the heavy metal galaxy, the demo cassettes were the most important artefacts. These were crucial for staying updated with the evolution of the sound.

I ordered such demos as Mutilator 'Omen of Dark Fate' 1987, Mutilated 'Psychodeath Lunatics' 1988, Asphyx 'Enter the Domain' 1989, Thormenthor (Portugal) 'Dissolved in the Absurd' 1991, Vacant Grave, Immolation two songs demo ... I had a real passion. The first band logos that saw the world were Disgrace (Finland) for their 'Inside the Labyrinth of Depression' 1991 demo and 'In the Grey Misery' 1992 debut album. Also, Excidium 1991 ep, Filii Nigrantium Infernalium demo 'Os Métodos do Pentagrama' 1993, Moonspell demo 'Anno Satanae' 1993, Emperor 'I am the Black Wizards' 1993 and 'Wrath of the Tyrant' 1992. That was the time when I enjoyed corresponding with tons of bands, metalheads and just maniaxxx from across the world with letters, tapes, and vinyl.

The experience working for 'Septicore' taught the mechanisms of communication, the necessary discipline, self-denial attitude, and most of all, the need to free one's inner light. The precious creativity hiding in distant bedrooms across the globe had a desperate need to flourish into the public domain.

I remember discovering Tarantula's legendary album 'Kingdom of Lusitania' 1990 and also buying the first rehearsal tape of a Portuguese band called Thormenthor.

The heavy metal scene generated a unique product during the 1980s, which ultimately absorbed Szpajdel: *my interest started to grow for unknown bands, and I went deeper in that domain by checking out rather obscure bands like Necrovore, Torture, Deadly Blessing, Blood Feast, Sadistic Intent, Morbid Angel, Nocturnus, Autopsy, Immolation to mention US bands. Obscurity, Mefisto, Nihilist (now Entombed),*

Merciless, Dismember, and Morbid to mention Swedish bands. Mayhem, Darkthrone to mention Norwegian bands. Black Shepherd, Cyclone, Warhead, Acid, Ancient Rites, and Morbid Death to mention some of my land-mates. And of course, South American bands like Masacre from Colombia, Sarcófago, Mutilator, Necromancer, Insulter/Sextrash, Tharithimas, Genocidio, MX, Explicit Hate to mention bands from Brazil, one of the countries that procreated one of the wildest scenes. You would never think about it, but it is the truth, listen to the inheritors like Krisiun, Rebaelliun, Ancestral Malediction, Abhorrence, Ophiolatry, the Brazilian scene is one of the most fascinating to me. The East European scene is also fantastic; especially some bands from Poland like Vader, Emperor, Hate, Lux Occulta, Behemoth, Kat, Pandemonium. Also, Krabathor, Pandemia, Sanatorium, Dementor, Root, Törr, from former Czechoslovakia, Regredior from Lithuania, Deathvomit from Russia. You can see all these bands contribute to strengthening my fanaticism to support the underground.

The ideal releases were always self-produced.

During these times, fanzines were a current thing and some excellent ones to remember are 'Slayer Mag' (Norway), 'Metallic Butcher' (Poland), 'Eternal Torment' (Poland), 'Morbidity Magazine' (Sweden), 'Necrotomy Zine' (Italy), 'Death Vomit Magazine' (USA), 'Isten' (Finland) and many more.

Everything flowed into the fanzines, a spontaneous model of horizontal accumulation and sharing like photocopied or mimeographed newspapers, cassettes, vinyl, patches and t-shirts, lyrics, slogans, logos everywhere.

1.4 UNDERSTANDING LOGO BRANDING

During his early teens, Christophe Szpajdel had been particularly fascinated with thrash metal due to its aesthetic. In heavy metal, a logo is more than just a brand. It mirrors a musical style, and in doing so, it contributes to defining the scene.

The ability to craft an identity through a logo, its magical seal of power, was described by Roberto Martinelli, editor in chief of the online magazine Maelstrom, in 2002 when interviewing Szpajdel.

I was inspired most by Sarcófago from Brazil and Possessed because their logo was readable yet evil.

In black metal, especially, there is a revered aesthetic like spikiness, illegibility and intricacy. Intangibility that tells the audience 'this is a cult album that is worth your time'.

From the Rolling Stones by John Pasche (British art designer) to Venom by Cronos (English artist, musician), there are many bands with logos that are more powerful than any photo or cover image. In

black metal, the cult album with the logo that defined the appearance of an entire scene is undoubtedly 'In the Nightside Eclipse' 1994 by Emperor.

During his workshops Szpajdel often underlines how the right logo design is necessary for a band to attract a certain range of public, to reflect what message the band is trying to send across. Music and visual art form an *entity*: some visuals would fit perfectly with black metal while others would convey perfectly with folk or ambient soundscapes. It is something that cannot be separated. A certain sort of aesthetics would convey a defined style of music.

Considering heavy metal to be a derivative of rock music ceased as it began to produce distinct sub-genres in every possible stylistic direction. It evolved into an autonomous cultural system.

Heavy metal is a family tree that is impossible to draw. The storyline expands on so many different levels. It flows along dimensions that rarely coincide with the picture portrayed in the media. Szpajdel, whose knowledge of the subject matter is formidable, shows us that metal historiography is arbitrary. Only what is worthy of being noticed and remembered is destined to remain. But who determines what shall remain?

The scene is like an oak which produces a lot of acorns, but only a few of them will become healthy oaks.

What also makes Szpajdel such a fascinating artist is the fact that he worked for years as a forest engineer. What better a metaphor then, offered by the one who formalized the arboreal lettering in graphics, of a scene described just like a forest?

With the universalization of acts against Christianity committed back in 1993, Szpajdel recognises the historical distinction between what happened before the birth of Norwegian black metal and what happened after the events of the Black Metal Inner Circle. At that time, they were a shock to our society, but then they provoked a general interest from the broad public.

As reported by many well-documented analyses, he associates the renewed media popularity of satanic imagery with the reaction by institutions. These reports were the first political recognition of Satanism on an international level. It is an unexpected collision of worlds, a misstep for the political and moral authorities of the West. In ontological terms, this affirmed one's opponent or enemy, and thus, made it real. Aleister Crowley had proposed a Satanism that operates as militant anti-Christianity; using morality to crack an entire philosophical system. His strategy worked perfectly. He gained social ex-communication and became an influencer for the cultural establishment of the time. But this precedent was not enough; they had fallen back on it.

The media storm that kicked-off over black metal increased its visibility exponentially and relaunched the phenomenon. During the first half of the 1990s, everything was possible and black metal was like oil on a fire. Imaginations exploded again.

Szpajdel's tale of his overnight stay in the ruins of Chicago Club gives an idea of how intimate and personal the process of creating the myth can be.

Another thing that's not a myth is the venue called Chicago Club in Annaberg-Buchholz, in Germany. It's one of the few places where Mayhem did their first gigs in Europe in 1991 when Dead (vocals) and Euronymous (guitars) were ruling. It's also one of the first places where Gorgoroth did their concerts. I visited this place after it burned down. I've even slept there. A lot of bizarre things happened to me during this night when I slept in the ruins of Chicago Club. Strange noises. Strange visions. Very twisted dreams. Fires, twisted people, but mostly a very indescribable scene. It was so close to reality that it could have happened next to me. At seven o'clock, the police woke me up and checked the place. In Germany, they are quite strict. It was identity control.

1.4 bis UNDERSTANDING LOGO BRANDING: SUBTRACTION AND FAMILY

We love each other but don't like people. – Gucci Mane

Gucci Mane thus summarized the meaning of each music scene: subtraction and family, the preconditions of a subculture. The friendship with Thierry Prince had taken place precisely because of elective affinities between similar minds, but growing up the essence of metal was no longer only in self-suggestion and awe but instead in watching and crossing over:

In 1989, Bill Steer of Carcass said: *I think it's stupid to say, 'I'm only metal, I only stay in my circle'. I think open-mindedness is the key to success.*

Before embarking on his continuous travels during the first half of the 1990s, Christophe Szpajdel had followed every evolution and contamination of the scenes he loved. Through the interviews released over three decades, it is possible to see even the less evident changes of those worlds.

Post-black metal has taken a lot of elements of industrial, ethnic, folk, ambient ... and incorporated them in the body of their music, which made them evolve drastically from traditional black metal. Some amazing bands I have discovered in the post-black metal genre are Alcest, Agalloch, Nihil (Belgium), Alkerdeel (Belgium), Aluk Todolo (France), Ninth Moon Black (USA), Bosque (Portugal). Now, post-black metal is merging with lots of new styles like stoner and dr(((o)))ne music. One of my favourite festivals

where I'd like to take part with a talk and exhibition is the 'Amplifest' in Portugal, as well as the 'Stella Natura' in the USA, the 'Aurora Infernalis' (Netherlands), the 'Kilkim Žaibu' (Lithuania), and the 'Kazbegi Fest' (Georgia).

The difference between sub-genres is something esoteric; it can be heard only by hard-core listening by the people who play or go to concerts, in other words: by the scene itself.

Things were more difficult but also more natural. Some pen pals I was in contact with through the ages were also involved in bands later. By these times, the tools to promote the bands were recommendations through word of mouth, fanzines and tape-trading as well as spreading flyers. Someone who got a flyer in the mail was potentially a client to order a demo by sending five or six dollars well wrapped in carbon paper through the mail. Someone who liked a demo added a note like 'Check this band, amazing stuff if you like pure death metal in the vein of Morbid Angel or Possessed'. Tape-trading was very important in the scene back then as it was spreading the name of the band. That was what I remembered very well when exchanging mail with pen pals across the world.

I still remember these glorious times when I could draw, write letters with pen pals across the world and talk about metal bands. Bands like Black Shepherd who was just about to release their long-awaited debut album

'Immortal Aggression' 1988, just a few months after Sepultura released 'Schizophrenia' 1987, their best album ... And look at the common points between Black Shepherd and Sarcófago when they released 'INRI' 1987. These common points were obvious: dirty, filthy black/speed/death metal the way of the iron warrior.

With the marked propensity to learn and voracious curiosity, Christophe Szpajdel became who he is today. He had the chance to live during the golden age of metal, and his knowledge is unsurpassed and responds to interviews colloquially, with fragmented and punctuated lists of names backing his statements. He tells a real story.

We once asked Christophe (sitting at a bar table, while he was in a "fix"), when and where he wanted to go if he had a time machine. He thought about it and said: *I would return to the golden age of death and black metal, especially in South America, and possibly hang out with bands like Sarcófago.* Funnily enough, he would not have wanted anything else than what he already had. He only wanted to do it with deeper awareness. For someone who lives on all levels of heavy metal, the time machine is useless. And the scenes were not something to be thought about with nostalgia; simply because they never came out of it.

The musical scene of a city is the intersection of experiences shared by those who carry out local artistic activities. These being the musicians, local promoters, shop and club owners and workers, and their domains such as rehearsal and performance spaces and private houses and public venues. Shared experiences that are the result of how people produce and listen to music live and the moulded area in which they do this. Swinging London was an example of a local scene that had broken down the unstable boundaries of the metropolis and became a model, a cliché, of Western style.

In the essays produced by the contributors of the 'Black Metal Symposium', frequent reference is made to the abyss (may it be black or green), to deep (inner or outer) space and to decay. These are some of the characteristics that permeated decades of metal dreams.

Christophe Szpajdel is one of the architects of these dreams. He is one of the creators of the thousand levels of the heavy metal rhizome. It is in some minor commissions that some paradoxes of the scene became apparent.

Often, they (satanic imagery symbols) have been misused and misunderstood. I spoke to many people wearing it: they have no clue of what they are wearing. For me, the use of occult imagery on a logo requires me to do research, a study of what it exactly means. Some fashion designers admit they have been into black metal in their younger times. Twenty years since my art got involved. At that time, I never thought occult art would reach as far as fashion, but now, since this is a very much spoken subject, it has been the darling of the media and has reached as far as possible.

New flashes follow any recent metal revival in the industry's culture. Szpajdel produces an average of eighty logos per month, and he notices an increasing number of bands contacting him because they want to have their logo revamped or adapted to the new musical direction they are taking. This trend indicates that the new generations are aware of the complexity of the previous symbolic system. Rather than experimenting themselves, they turn to the masters. Szpajdel's example suggests otherwise. It is from the ability to perceive details and to discover unseen anchor points to make new connections that new languages can spontaneously arise.

2.1 PERSPECTIVES

Christophe Szpajdel is basically a straight edge, one of those people whose enthusiasm and determination do not need a trigger. And we are therefore on an exquisitely metaphorical level when we hear him say that *to draw is like drugs to me*, that he got addicted and won't free himself from his self raised drug until he dies. Like heroin for a junkie: drawing is his *whole life*.

At the end of the 1980s, Christophe Szpajdel was still drawing mainly for himself. After high school, he tried unsuccessfully to enter some art academies and, in agreement with his parents, opted for forest engineering studies. This choice protected his personal condition, managing to preserve the art of drawing as his mother language. Establishing himself as a creator of logos in an interweaving of scenes growing and swirling was what Szpajdel did as soon as he left home. And while in search of a style, he found hundreds.

Ihsahn of Emperor, in an interview by Kim Kelly (Noisey 2017), described a condition like that of Christophe in his early years when he says that at the heart of it is the deep desire to distance yourself from everything else that you see that feels very hypocritical. *If you dissect things, obviously there are so many things that we accept in society that are fundamentally wrong. As a teenager drawn to this type of music, that's where you're at—you want to distance yourself not to become that. I mean, the stuff I was wearing at the time, I think it was as much to convince myself as everybody else. In my experience of being that young, when you take such a strong stance and put it out there, then you're confronted. People don't care if you're a teenager, they attack you hard, and then you learn very much from that process and from that side of society when you place yourself totally on the outside. And having to defend all these extreme views, you can build on that as a person.*

Christophe recalls: *people into art schools I visited also rejected my 'silly satanic doodles' and 'dark scenic drawings' with a gaping mouth of disdain.*

The attacks were not coming only from other kids but from society itself. This situation resounded with Hunter Hunt-Hendrix when talking about the manifestation of his transcendental black metal consciousness. A void experienced by those of us unable to integrate into a community with a collective spirituality. The bondage of isolation, self-obsession, and disconnection. Disconnection and rejection, in the presence of a vibrant talent, are conditions for new perspectives.

I have been told by my parents on many occasions that art has no future at all and that the only way to get a future would be sciences, maths and languages. I was struggling with maths but made rather good scores in biology.

I listened to my parents and took a degree in forestry after my school years, starting in 1989.

The first logo I did for somebody is the logo of the 'Morbid Noise' compilation, inspired by the old Sepultura logo, back in 1989. The first band logo that got used was the logo of Finnish death metallers Disgrace. This logo appeared on their 1990 demo 'Inside the Labyrinth of Depression' and their debut album 'Grey Misery' before they changed their music style into more 1970s Rock.

From the Disgrace logo to the present day, Christophe Szpajdel has designed approximately thirteen thousand logos. He was in a continuous creative flow, which suggests how the monumental retrospective 'Lord of the Logos' (Gestalten 2010) shows just the tip of the iceberg.

It is just incredible in how many boxes of logos I have stored. I keep myself going with logos and drawing logos is like a drug, impossible to stop.

As we conversed at a restaurant table, we observed him filling pages with studies for the same logo. Confusing precursors that helped him focus on an idea he knew would come soon. We watched him for a while, before dessert, and he identified the right sketch and then got entirely absorbed by it for the rest of the day.

I sometimes have no control over my compulsions ...I have sorts of waves of creativity, and when I am surfing on such a wave, nothing can stop me.

That is the condition that makes him suddenly sit down in the middle of a busy car park and unpack his drawing gear and jot down the preliminary sketch of a logo. Because he is constantly immersed in a sort of lucid inspirational trance. If he visualize something in his mind, he must throw it on paper right away. He cannot wait. In his words, drawing a logo is an experience sometimes similar an *epileptic attack*.

And when a workflow grows to become a torrent, we are no longer just talking about work.

Sometimes when my pens go funny or stop writing, I destroy them brutally in a temper tantrum.

2.2 BECOMING EMPEROR

By the time his technical and graphic arts schooling had ended, and more demanding studies were on the horizon, Christophe Szpajdel's artistic activity had found its equilibrium. His visual style started to be recognisable and had been formed by repeating freehand sketches of nature as it appeared to him; dark and splendid.

That is also the time when I received interest from people like Dan Swano (Edge of Sanity) and Mike Browning (Nocturnus), through Thierry's correspondence. Shortly after I was sharing the correspondence duties with Thierry and that is also how I met Samoth who later formed Emperor together with Mortis, Faust and Ihsahn.

So, Szpajdel made the Emperor logo, which remains one of his favourites – simple and striking.

In January 1991, I designed what would become the iconic logo of Emperor.

It was like one single shot; I did one unique design, no sketches, just the symmetrical pencil draft that I later inked and sent to Mortiis and then to Samoth. Mortiis answered my letters in the third person like 'This is him, Emperor bass player Mortiis returning to you. He will decide if this logo will be used or not'... then I also contacted Samoth to have a confirmation and to confirm that I am the same guy who did the logo because Mortiis was too strange to hold a correspondence with.

His name appeared on Emperor's debut CD cover 'In the Nightside Eclipse', and soon after, he designed logos for Blasphemia (pre-Enthroned), Excidium, and Maleficarium. From that moment everything started to move faster.

My name started to travel across the world with the release of this album in 1994. It coincided with the uprising of the second wave of black metal.

That was indeed a crucial point because the black metal scene in Scandinavia was reaching its apogee, a pinnacle of excellence and I just made it right on time by completing the Emperor logo in 1991 and seeing it sailing the seven seas in 1994. The album was unleashed upon the public in Summer 1994 when I was travelling to the South West of France. The amazing news happened when I was located in the Corrèze department (Beaulieu Sur Dordogne) to be precise, and I had this taste for adventure, wanderlust and roaming through scenic routes. There were soon after other bands like Autumn Leaves from Denmark, Covenant, also from Norway who, like 'prongs', left a trail in the music industry. 1994 is the year when my name made the Tour du Monde in 80 days. I started getting contacted by post to my regular address in Belgium and had to set a PO Box to minimise letters to be undelivered or lost and I was still in my studies in Louvain-la-Neuve.

Similar possibilities were beginning to appear with increasing frequency, from the revamp of the Filii Nigrae Infernalis logo to the Moonspell logo. And then he got in touch with Alexis and Cernunnos of Enthroned.

Enthroned is one of the biggest bands I worked with alongside Emperor. That was how I left a significant footprint in the early 1990s black metal scene.

And then more logos in his classic style followed for Covenant, Arcturus, Old Man's Child, Autumn Leaves, Falkenbach, Desaster, Horna, Tsjuder, Avatar, Enthroned, Magia Posthuma, In Memoriam, First Born Evil, Goldenpyre, Seth, Bekhira, Cryptic Tales. His name began to resonate through fanzines and credits.

One day, it happened in 1994 when I got my first interview in 'Fear of Life' magazine and a small article in 'Ornament' magazine. Then I started to get a demand from many bands to do a logo.

At this point, after completing his studies, logo design could have been his job.

I felt a powerful breath of freedom and independence, starting to travel across Europe by hitch-hiking as I did in the spring in the Czech Republic and the summer in the South of France.

Travelling takes him to those places that are both Art Nouveau, his primary inspiration, and heavy metal, across Europe. He could have decided to make a living out of this, but he decided otherwise.

2.3 WORK ETHIC

despite being Christophe Szpajdel's primary activity, logo design remains a secondary effort aside from a paid job.

My logo art is a source of second income, alas not consistent enough yet to make a living of my art.

Today he admits that it should not be otherwise. Like when he was asked in an interview how much he was getting paid for his graphic work:

There is kind of an agreement, but it's very seldom respected. If I do a logo for a band, my request is to get ten, maybe more, copies of the CD when it's out. It's a simple reason: to promote the band and make some money. I mean some additional money. I have various jobs, like the job with Metal Lycée, which is an organization in Belgium. My main job is in forestry. This art is my main passion: to keep drawing the logos, to keep publishing the newsletters the very few times I'm home. Very often I'm on the road, and I like this way of life.

In 2015 Szpajdel estimated that he works on logo design approximately thirty hours a week, while he spends nearly forty hours at his regular job as retail assistant. Although it is easy to imagine the time dedicated to logos is much more than declared, Szpajdel repeated us many times how much he enjoys his day job, because it is a safe and simple space when he can recover his creative energy, beside being a significative support to his travel expenses. Sometimes he also draw logos during hi break at work.

His clients inspire his itineraries as well and digging unexpected sounds from unheard of places is yet another way to plan his travels.

I have confirmed about seventy clients from all over the world for February and March. There are bands from as far as Georgia (Caucasus), Armenia, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela,

Colombia, Mexico, Jordan, Croatia, Serbia, Greece. And there are a few Portuguese bands I am also confirming like Sonneillon Black Metal and Caverna.

Along with travelling, Szpajdel's priority is always to show and spread his work. Customers are necessary but complicated to manage, yet his graphic style is so pervasive that it guides him towards solutions where no one else would have looked. Like when he came to collaborate with Rihanna after a casual chat with a stranger on the subway, or when he met author Hendrik Heilige in an airport hall at midnight and how he would later end up publishing Szpajdel's first monograph.

2.4 LORD OF THE LOGOS

The idea of a volume that contained an extensive retrospective of his work had been in Christophe Szpajdel's mind for some time. The chance came through the Vice magazine interview in 2008.

That had been taking the mick out of me, but great, they turned me into a weirdo.

He ended up providing stylised and exaggerated renditions of his work to be represented in the book. By colouring in the blackened attributes of the logos, he, with the help of Hendrik Heilige, had created the right conditions to attract the attention of a large publishing house. The story that Christophe tells takes us back to the possibilities offered by travel.

A few days before heading to the 'United Metal Maniacs Festung Open Air' festival in Berlin, 2009, I had been contacted by Hendrik from Gestalten. So, I added a private meeting in Berlin when stopping at the airport to meet up with Hendrik. I brought compact discs with all my logos that he saved on his computer as well as photos.

During that meeting, we drafted the plans face-to-face. Hendrik met me on my arrival even if it was almost midnight. We had a drink and a long chat of how the book is going to look. I loved the proposal, and we went on with it. On my return, we drafted the contract.

In June, Julian Sorge (Gestalten Publishers) sent him the contract, and in September he supplied five thousand logos. Two thousand five hundred were used and organized into chapters, and after what Christophe calls lengthy negotiations, they agreed on calling it 'Lord of the Logos'. That was the name he was known as when talking about visual art, especially logo art, in the underground metal community.

The name 'Lord of the Logos' was chosen by my fan base and first started by fans in Texas.

When I did the Kovenant Rose logo in 2004... Then that name started to circulate on MySpace.

MySpace at these times was a mostly American matter, and I gathered a mostly American fan base and client base. That is where I got in touch with such bands as Sin Origin, Engorge, Velonnic Sin, Cold Northern Vengeance, Pit Fiends, to mention a few memorable bands and projects.

And it spread out; I just adopted that name as more and more people started using that moniker when talking to each other. I have worked with quite a lot of bands from Texas like Emperial Massacre, Vesperian Sorrow, LaSanche, Bestemmia Aeternalis, Abythos, Carcinoma, Plutonian Shore, Forever Mourne, and Humut Tabal. They are huge fans of my works, and around 2005 were many to summon my work.

In October he created the logo for the cover, and finally, at the end of January 'Lord of the Logos' was released and distributed worldwide.

On the Gestalten website, the book description is as follows: *this book is a collection of work by Christophe Szpajdel, an artist whose fans in the underground black metal community worship him as the Lord of the Logos. This publication, which is done in the style of a black prayerbook, shows not only how he has succeeded in leaving his own visual mark on this music, but how he has also expanded the canon of forms it uses.*

Starting from the title that was influenced by the 'Lords of Chaos' cult chronicles, they instead chose the singular form 'Lord' to emphasize his respected standing in the logo design community.

I would not entirely agree that I have created the icon of an extreme musical genre, as the title would suggest. There have been some great logo artists who created some amazing logos like Darkthrone, Grottesque, Sarcófago, Possessed, Necrovore. I had indisputably contributed to the assembling of an image for extreme metal music genres and sub-genres, but it is a fair share, not a monopoly. I don't want people to think I have created an icon and emblem for an extreme musical genre. Logos like Mayhem, Immortal, Marduk, Darkthrone, Demoncy are equally amazing, and they are not created by me.

The first and only edition of the 'Lord of the Logos' book has reached the collector's item status. It commands high prices in private sales, and graphic designers recognise it as an object of obsessive devotion. It serves as an inexhaustible goldmine of technical solutions and artistic vision.

Booksellers like Abebooks, in the synopsis of their e-shop, write that: *Szpajdel has brought a new dynamic into the gothic visuality of heavy metal.*

He has succeeded in leaving his own visual mark on this music, but how he has also expanded the canon of forms it uses.

Christophe Szpajdel is a brilliant Homme Sauvage of logo design. His authority in branding provides a constant flow of workshops and seminars, and one of his main topics is clarity.

A logo should be compelling, memorable, readable, and distinct. That means it should be something that you will remember once for the rest of your life.

2.5 JUST ONE GLIMPSE

A logo must reflect the music style and the excellence of the band in just one glimpse. The understanding of a logo depends on who tries to read it. For every music genre and sub-genre, there are more and more distinctive logos coming along. A logo is like a calling card for a band to express and articulate their musical and lyrical contents in a nutshell. A group of letters put together to form an entity; these letters connect to form a word.

After Christophe Szpajdel's first draft, the next step is always getting feedback from the customer to gauge their feelings about the logo. *I try to have a clear understanding of what the band wants. Understanding is the crucial point.*

Since the initial drafts of a logo are in pencil, and Christophe drives to continue improving on his work, he keeps revising and restructuring the logos with the necessary tools always in his pockets.

You cannot create a logo without wearing out your pencils, erasers, pens.

A typical design takes a minimum of two weeks and can last up to six weeks or more. It all starts on a black A4.

First, I take an A4 sheet that I divide in four, using the medians so that I can work around the centre towards the edges.

I do a rough thumbnail; then I see how I can fit the whole artwork on an A4 sheet (29.7 cm x 21cm). I start the pencil work from the centre and then go towards the edges, limiting where I will reach the limits, fitting the letters, the axes of symmetry, distributing the letters that the logo is fully balanced, without having empty spaces that may make the logo unbalanced.

Szpajdel applies the techniques of Timothy L. Pflueger (the American architect).

It is using a drawing board with a rolling device that helps to make the architectural lines perfectly parallel. Szpajdel then includes the letters, tweaking them into the whole motif and then applying ornate trimmings, with volutes, floral motives like stylised ferns for examples, and headdresses, thunderbolts, etc.

So, the guidelines involve a lot of research, imagination, tweaking the letters into one or several geometrical shapes to come up with something aesthetically pleasing. It must be functional as well so that it can work very well on its own or an album cover.

He carries on different projects at the same time, which allows the sketches to mature for a few days. He also listens to the music of the bands he's designing for during this period. Although this is necessary to inspire the design of a logo, it is not sufficient enough.

I need as many guidelines as possible to do the logo perfectly; therefore, I must click with the client.

Christophe prints every email of the client, where he asks to specify what details he should pay attention to, as so many things can go wrong during such complex communications.

During the first days, I send sketches back and forward. I often draw some thumbnails before the full-scale draft, which holds on an A4 white paper. A sketch is straightforward to amend while an ink outlined design is impossible to change. The reason why, once I send the sketch, I wait for the approval.¹⁶

Once the approval arrives, he moves from graphite to ink.

The next steps are the pen stage. I call that the outlining. For that stage of the logo, I use Edding or Staedtler or Pilot 0.5, 0.3, and 0.1 drawing pens. Then I do the filling with a thick black marker to make it quicker. Once I've got the filling done, then I do all the upgrading, using again, a thin drawing pen. I work per schedule, not on just one logo at the time. Once I got a batch of sketches fully approved, then I 'work' them. One week for the outlining and filling, next week for upgrades.

In 2004 he started using a scanner to email the logos and, again, it all started to go faster.

Once he finishes a logo, he books scanning sessions at the public library in Exeter and delivers them on the same day. It sounded strange to read this in an interview, as I imagined him to be technologically self-sufficient but also somehow more random in the deliveries. While I witnessed perfect organization and a disciplined man that – just like me – refuses to have more technology in the house than strictly necessary.

I get a few of my companions (Death by Graphic Designs, Norgith Demonrace, Joseph Hollo, Rachel Young ...) to digitalise the logo and convert them in the format the clients require. As fantastic I am with my hands, as miserably I fail when it goes to PC software. I have attempted several courses to learn about Photoshop, MS Paint, IT logistics and ended up being dropped out and advised to look into private one-to-one tuitions, which unfortunately I can't afford now.¹⁷

But in the time of the fastest technological evolution that humanity has known, craftsmanship remains an added value; hand-producing abstract thought through graphic design. Szpajdel is inevitably involved in collaborations and mixed media works, and his curiosity prevents him from stepping back even when it comes to getting out of his comfort zone.

*A few excellent examples of 'hybrid' logos are where I got the first drafts and structures created by Dennis Hughes (Moon of Cythraul) or Norgith Demonrace who is an incredibly fast mind reader able to capture subtle details ... to nail it first. Once I have his draft, I am producing a second draft and then continuing it further.*¹⁸

He seems to work smoothly with the faster methods of digital shared workflows.

Five hundred quick sketches that take me three seconds each to do, to a client who is frequently requesting updates and for me who is travelling a lot with public transport is a way to be effective and proficient, giving the client as many options as possible. In my case, it takes me a lot quicker to make quick pencil sketches than samples on the computer. I can do one hundred quick pencil sketches the time someone else would complete one or two samples on the computer or iPad. In my case, mobility is essential as I do travel a lot and I must be able to catch an idea in flight or update clients regularly, especially in the world we live in, which is characterised by competition.

2.6 NOMADIC LOGO DESIGN

The fact that work integrates seamlessly with mobility gives Christophe Szpajdel the opportunity to plan his nomadism carefully. He can attend exhibitions or display logos at heavy metal festivals; taking the opportunity to stay and visit the places. He absorbs the sights and draws immediate inspiration from them. Work – travel – art, his personal triangle.

Besides drawing logos, I draw logos, besides travelling, I travel and besides supporting bands I support bands. Travelling to feed one's creativity and travelling to spread his productions intersect.

With each destination being a critical point in the life of Christophe Szpajdel.

He considers imperative that people know where and when he is exhibiting, because this is an important part of the whole creative process: how he is disseminating his art and making people aware of what he is doing.

This way is exploring new perspectives and new artistic adventures. Christophe Szpajdel's different worlds coexist with a tension like that of Hergé's explosions; a life that is a constellation of logos from which he

can draw maps that lead him to unexpected destinations. Within all this, he has a family too, and the search for waged work. He could get hired on projects promoted by Natura 2000 of the Council of Europe or for the WWF, thus following the career path defined by his studies. He had several traineeship practices in North Poland in 2007, in the Azores in 2008 and at the Council of Europe for the Natura 2000. In 1998 he went for several months to the Azores for a forestry engineering job where he had *the best moments so far in my life*.

It's a group of nine islands. I've been there for practising being a forestry engineer on the few islands of the central group: Terceira, Pico, Faial, São Jorge, and Graciosa.

Accessing forest engineering positions is the reason he studied agronomy; a job that would have allowed him to spend a lot of time in the field, *in the heart of nature*, so that he could *see and taste the things as they are in nature*. As we know he had always been fascinated by the behaviour of the wildlife population. *There are some laws in nature between different species. Only by watching them it is possible to discover that not only between people there are rules, but there are tough rules in nature.*

Since the second part of the 1990s, he had the chance to visit the significant tour dates of such bands as Morbid Angel, Immortal, Marduk, Cannibal Corpse, Vader, and Infernal Majesty. Also, he could join in on many tours with such groups as Krisiun, Gorgoroth, Arkhon Infaustus and Mortician. Generally, he loves travelling to underground shows with local bands.

By receiving invitations from places where he once sent pen pals' letters to, Szpajdel became aware of where his design took him.

In 2002, Szpajdel emigrated to the United Kingdom, as he got offered a job requiring the knowledge of several languages in Leamington Spa. It was only in 2006, when he made his final move to Exeter, that he decided to settle down, and bought a house. Since then, when not drawing, he works as a retail assistant for the Co-Operative.

3.1 LOCAL IN DEVON

'Darkening Ligne Claire' is the title of an exhibition and an album dedicated to him by Liles/Maniac (Andrew Liles from Current 93 and Nurse with Wound plus ex-Mayhem singer Maniac). It is also another alias for Christophe Szpajdel as 'Archaeological Records' suggested to him that, due to his biographical links with the land where ligne claire was invented but also to his black metal affiliation. He can be an heir that uses its heritage to darken and blacken, and that this can be a strong metaphor to present his first photographic exhibition — a dark eye.

In 2005, at the age of twenty-five, he started doing photos. He often mentioned that taking pictures was an important part of the creative process, and how taking photos of animals is helpful for him to incorporate them in logo endeavours when it gets the need.

While being on the road, photography came as an essential requirement. So, Christophe bought a small digital camera and many memory cards. On the occasion of the preliminary work for his photographic exhibition 'Darkening Ligne Claire', "we faced tens of thousands of shots contained in thirty cards stored in sealed plastic bags. We realized that many were not formatted: they were like negatives, carefully stored matrices".

The family home was now a base camp for storing affections and archives, while his English residence would have represented a base camp for financing and organizing his travels.

He started to diversify his work in 2006, which was corresponding to the time he moved from Leamington Spa to Exeter. *I have made Exeter my stomping ground*, he told us when we first visited him there.

Christophe chose Exeter for many reasons, and none of them has anything to do with heavy metal scenes. It is a quiet place where the architecture subtly recalls excellent times. It is a residential area with changing sunsets framing the outskirts that reminisce the landscape of Belgium. When writing about Szpajdel, a local journalist who had visited his studio during the East Devon Arts Festival mentioned how often he spotted the artist drawing at Rougemont Gardens and the Mill on the Exe.

The context, the environment, and what surrounds him is vital for channelling his abstract thought — everything from searching for a home to his passion for drawing. What surrounds him is extremely influential when drawing logos. To give an example he cites the logo he did for Omitir where the inspiration derived from the Rossio train station in Lisbon. There are lots of his logos inspired by reflections of trees on the water in the winter, especially for all the depressive/dark ambient bands. *I do take lots of inspiration from nature, but also architectural patterns that I like in particular.*

Travelling is also a way of collecting material useful for further use, a way to store visual experiences. If the hanging gallows of the Emperor logo first evoked a medievalist impression then after a closer look, we can now find a wider variety of cultural elements.

Always keep your eyes open, keep watching because whatever you see can inspire you, as I have indeed made more and more research to endorse a band with the right imagery. Parallel to this, I have delved into cultures like Hispanic/Iberian cultures, architectures and history of many parts of Europe. Plus, a central interest for Renaissance, Art Nouveau, classicism, Art Deco but also, over the last few years, a re-exploration of Middle Eastern, Georgian, Caucasian culture, which has, as conservative as illustrative,

helped me to push back my limits to further fields. Travelling has been a preponderant ingredient to gain and enlarge inspirations in my new artistic ventures.

Travelling as an artistic venture– travel, draw, share, and again.

3.2 COORDINATES

This is my main passion: keep drawing the logos and keep publishing the newsletters the very few times I'm home. Very often I'm on the road, and I like this way of life.

Christophe Szpajdel is a psycho-geographer with a precise itinerary. Psycho-geography is an indescribable discipline that dissolves the boundaries between art and life. Something that makes the landscape and the inner-scape clash. According to Guy Debord, psycho-geography is *the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals* (1955). Coordinates. Travelling. Time and space and scenes.

In the last decade Szpajdel frequently recalls the importance of the link between making art and being able to live thanks to it. It is the center of his ambitions and to better trace a trajectory he posted the graphic representation above his head, never to forget the idea of three dimensions. Time, raw action, and space. The first helps to manage the transition from archaic, even *primordial*, logos to modern ones. The second being a metaphor for "work" and its ethics, but also a reference to nature and its call to action, *temperament*, which is the transition from very fluid logos to brutal and rough ones. And finally space, cartography geography: the grid and linearity required by any project, from architecture to comics, which can however be exasperated and extended to impossible intertwining.

Szpajdel explicitly connects travel and art, and after decades of methodological experimentations, he declares to have reached an equilibrium, to have closed his triangle. The graphic representation is still there, but is not necessary anymore: the method has been internalized, and when he works it all comes easy and natural. It started as an uncontrollable need, then with a lot of practice it was possible to refine a method and now it's all just flowing.

The reason why he has never moved from logo design is also connected to travel

I couldn't do that with album covers as that requires much bigger pieces of support like canvas, oil colours, while logo work only requires A4 sheets of paper and straight pens/black markers. That is the main reason why technically, I am not able to undertake album cover commissions. I am too much on the move, and that is very unlikely to change for the next few years. I have in fact trips planned to

Georgia, Armenia, Australia, Brasil, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Mexico, Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Pontos/Hellespont which are the parts of the world that interest me the most. Therefore, undertaking album covers would be difficult. I had confirmed that I could work on a batch of logos while away. I have completed something like sixty logos during my stay in Minneapolis, for example. I was doing talks while there, and the rest of the time, I was doing research and worked on quite a bunch of logos. Please note that while away, I do not check my email.

But despite his logistic limits, Christophe Szpajdel is open and anti-hierarchical when it comes to collaborating.

This is something I am trying to develop. I worked successfully on some logos with Jeremy Regnum (Winterblast Halls, Taranis, Satanahash), Hellyn Goodwin (Wikkid Gifts logo), Stephan Artist (Ninth Moon Black, Mares of Diomedes), Chris Horst (Midnight Odyssey, Age of Fire), Maggot Meister (Abnormal Human Experiment, Darkside of Innocence), Melanie Knight (Milder's Masks Exeter), Csaba Nemeth (Senium, Ancient Sorrow), and Jarrett LeMasters. I am striving to work with more artists.

And he did, providing a long list of experiments:

I do observe artists and their work. Some very important recent inspirations to me have been Susan Cavaliere (Torquay), Adam Kinsman (Wellington), Nick Keller (Wellington), Ungodly Graphics (Russia), Dennis Hughes (Colorado, USA), Samir Pradhan (Darjeeling, India), Chris Horst (Virginia, USA), Raoul Gozerian (Italy/NJ-USA), Norgith Demonrace (Eugene-Oregon, USA), Jennifer Utley (Portland-Oregon), Drea Stevens (Lincoln, UK), Adam Watson (UK), Morbus Shores (California, USA), Vojtech Moonroot (Czech Republic), Matthew Pape (Death by Design Graphics), Jim Van Klaveren (The Netherlands), Peter Designificance (The Netherlands), Pierre Debatty (Belgium), Brandon Torres (USA), Alemsahim (Mexico), Gragoth Lvciferivm War Graphics (Seattle, USA), Medan Savamhel Ba'al graphics (The Netherlands), Rosie Kearton (UK), Karlynn Holland (USA), Hannah Grace (UK), Alvin Pankhurst (New Zealand), Ivan Clarke (New Zealand, famous for his Lonely Dog illustrations), Jennifer Monteith (Jam UK- Weston Super-Mare), Vincent Trebuchet (Detroit, USA), Holly Mercieca (UK), Grayson Perry (UK), Timothy Douel (UK), Andre Coelho (Portugal), Harriet Cross (UK), Merle Hunt (UK), Hellyn Goodwin (Plymouth, UK), Chris Reilly (UK), Caroline Wallis (St Austell, UK), and there are many more I would like to mention.

3.3 EXPOSITIONS

And then there are the exhibitions. The first was internal to the scene, the inevitable ideal visual counterpart of each micro-festival. Then, gradually during the 1990s, Christophe Szpajdel began to exhibit his work in the foyers of ever-larger gigs,

spontaneously, meeting new friends and assignments.

In the same period, Christophe Szpajdel started considering exhibitions in proper galleries as something serious. He has taken part in over two hundred shows, playing a functional role to support the needs of the heavy metal audience and the art curators. The connection between the artists' history and their adherence to the scene would project a new light on the artists' position within the scene itself.

As has already happened, the echo of a renewed media exposure has unpredictable consequences. Like the strange episode of the Foo Fighters sweater.

I caught Foo Fighters having ripped off my Emperor logo for some stupid Christmas jumpers, I could have taken to court, but instead, I have been acting differently. I offered them a new 'black metal' logo that could be much more suitable, and that includes the Foo Fighters in a ring trademark. I have saved money in lawyers and court costs and got a very nice deal.

A retrospective of Christophe's logos celebrates his career, but it always helps unveil the inspirational link between underground and mainstream. In this sense, the story of how Christophe ended up collaborating with Rihanna is an even more useful example to understand how much Christophe has penetrated pop culture. On the first of July 2015, while travelling on the tube between Canada Water and London Paddington he encountered a member of Rihanna's management team. This chance meeting was after an exhibition he was having in London for the 'Cult Visions' book launch with Dayal Patterson (writer, 'Metal Hammer' magazine) and Billie Webster (artist).

I always happen to meet interesting people and miss the stop. I have to get out and connect to another train. I always get flustered when on the London tube.

I passed her one of my sturdy black and gold 'Lord of the Logos' books.

After a few days he got contacted by Clare Gillen, from Philadelphia. She was probably the same person he bumped on the tube in London and he declared that originally he thought she wanted to commission him for a Rihanna logo just for personal use. But things turned differently in August when Clare Gillen got LA based manager Cindy Lin involved and the request become more timely. At that moment Christophe was attending the Sidmouth Folk Festival and he used his spare moments to sneak into the Sidmouth library to work on the Rihanna logo. He used his usual sequence of pencils and pens, and delivered few sketches: they chose two of them, and he completed them. Luca Devinu digitalized the drawings, and the designs had to go through different layers of management before his design eventually reached Rihanna. He was paid 500\$ in total.

On the twenty-eighth of August 2016, at the 33rd MTV Video Music Awards in Madison Square Garden (NY), during the third medley of the Rihanna show, the logos were projected onto a one hundred foot

backdrop during a live performance of her single 'B*tch Better Have My Money'. The twelve backing dancers were also wearing shirts with the logos on them, and it was transmitted across the globe to millions of viewers.

Pop music and metal underground they couldn't seem more distant, from every point of view: yet, due to a fortuitous chain of events, a connection was created that evening. A contamination, on live world TV.

It was also unexpected that this commission would be such a giant leap in my career, unveiling me to a huge new audience who never has been familiar with any work of that type. But fashion is catching up, and more and more people are now getting acquainted with my work.

The logo had appeared in giant letters behind her and, as might have been foreseen following the internet immediate blurb, the t-shirts were already printed and for sale.

If it were ten years ago Szpajdel would have surely been reluctant to create a logo for Rihanna, but now he is a different person. He is still exactly the same metal fan as he was in his teens, but he is now driven by his art, and his nomadism contributed too in making him more open and curious. Obviously there have been criticism from metal underground communities, a dark and predictable blurb that mainly expressed concern about him going mainstream. Even if in fact, from their point of view, the risk was even greater: that the underground was being sold off to the compulsive needs of fashion. A tendency already carried on by Metallica. But Szpajdel proudly decided to take the risk, because his art's need today is to expand its audience.

And then came Metallica's 'ManUNkind' video, directed by Jonas Åkerlund. Jonas, who is keen on Christophe's work, invited Christophe to design both Metallica's logo and the song title lettering. The fact that he took the chance offered by the external spikes of the 'M' and the

'A' to insert two inverted crosses in the famous brand was probably the client's will. It was easy to imagine why Jonas was looking for minimalist yet clear symbols that would help him build the black metal atmosphere as per the concept's needs.

3.4 EXHIBITIONS

Christophe Szpajdel attends exhibitions anywhere in the world but is incredibly supportive of the local community by being actively involved in events. In Devon, he exhibited at WooHoo Art Events, Powderham Castle, and at the Phoenix and Glorious Art House in Exeter. While with the Devon Artist

Network Open Studios, he faced a curatorial challenge that resulted in another moment of growth in his professional awareness.

The Devon Open Studios involved me in a lot of effort. I had to find a venue, and then advertise the event through the Devon Open Studio guide, which is published by the Devon Artist Network Administrator group. When it went to the Devon Open Studios, during the whole enrolment process, I had to change venues due to misunderstandings with the owner of the first selected venue. Originally, the event was supposed to have taken place in a big warehouse situated on the Exe River banks, in a disaffected industrial estate but when I viewed that, I realized it was a complete misunderstanding. I had to look for an alternative venue in a rush. It was May when the Guide was due to be ready for June to be published in August. Luckily, I found the North Bridge Inn, where I could set up my exhibition. Initially, I was planning to exhibit just myself, but during the process, I changed my mind for a group. The final line up of my group was a range of artists going from traditional to avant-garde/modern design.

The structure suggested by Christophe for the organization of the material conglomerate here would have provided a chapter on the relationship with customers and curators and the risks related to commercial relations. It was preferred to absorb the same topics in a different order, but the note of intent of the artist remains.

As Christophe stated of the workshop, he held at the András Szabó Seminary: *An exhibition should always be memorable and never be forgotten. The exhibition should be seen as a performance.*

I learned to perform visual art through logos and letterings. This art is where I am expressing not only myself but also other people's feelings.

On the occasion of the 'Darkening Ligne Claire' event (Florence December, 2019) – his first photographic exhibition – we gave Christophe about twenty slate tablets, on which he engraved quotes with a white marker. He applied bold lettering with a gothic tendency, reasoned capos, and some climbing glyphs where the rock offered more space, and he filled them all in less than an hour while conversing with a loud crowd.

But when asking Christophe Szpajdel if calligraphy is his passion, the answer is clear:

Logo art is something completely different than calligraphy. I worked with Ruth Sutherland, whose calligraphy is on a higher level than me. Logos and calligraphy are something completely different. A black metal logo, if upgraded, can serve as 'artwork' for a T-shirt or a poster. I have shown a lot of interest in typography and calligraphy, which are entirely different things than calligraphy as such. They do complete each other as I perused calligraphy to do some song titles. For my art, I would regroup several words: handmade logo art, typography and calligraphy, period.

He often defines himself as an artist specialising in typography. There is no univocal word to describe him. He is both an artist and a craftsman; he continually draws interlacing letters, and in doing so, he invents worlds. Unlike more fashionable designers, he has a clear vision of his position and his work in the world. The American artist Banks Violette, whose area is associated with underground metal, is accused of appropriation of black metal aesthetics for commercial purposes. But his use of amplifier cases, drum parts, or skeletal architectural structures have a more genuine appeal than Jonas Åkerlund's historiographic blurs.

Banks Violette conveyed to my art creative appeal with the shapes of portals, gates, notions of tallness.

But the art form with which he keeps a connection is music. The comprehensive knowledge of Christophe includes geography, art history, entomology and above all heavy metal history. And not only metal but also European and Middle Eastern archaic music cultures are covered. Music is the continuous soundtrack to his constant drawing; his musical influences are tangible.

Another idea in a logo was brought to my attention while I was listening to this song called 'Rachuli' by Jgufi Bani. Now I'd like you to make a similar approach when looking at some of my latest logos inspired by the Georgian alphabet and these two songs I just mentioned. I would like you to find what you will discover in the more rounded fonts logos while listening to these two songs. I do often start a new sketch with new ideas while finishing off a logo, again the reason I continually expand my batch of thirty logos or more. It is all about passion, it starts with passion, it revolves around passion, and it evolves with passion. Once I get carried away with drawing logos, I forget about this world that surrounds me and let my mind travel onto new ideas. That is also the reason why I work on a batch of logos and not on one single logo. While I start a new logo, some ideas emerge in a logo that I started a while ago. The duration of the process of a logo can take as much as one week, six weeks, and even more, if I fall out with a client, which happens when the client starts showing jealousy and disrespect. I have been very interested in Byzantine and Middle Eastern folk art. I am focussing on Georgian folk songs like that of Jgufi Bani 'Rachuli' or the one 'Mayvalas-Rdzlebi' or Theodoros Pavlidis. I have been rediscovering all the folk music I was enjoying when I was a teenage kid. Now, at the age of forty-two, I am rediscovering all the flaming passion. I must say, my work has started with my musical tastes, it revolves around them, and it shall evolve alongside them. I had a clear vision of Anthony Gormley's 'Angel of the North' while doing the picture plane logo; however, the client's vision was completely different. I am looking to explore more directions and these 'fly designs' come to my mind when listening to this beautiful ambient song from Hayastan (Armenia). Flying over unique countries like New Zealand and its range of mountains like The Remarkables are the perfect soul-food for such fly designs. I am looking to expand my originality and come up with lots of unexpected designs. It all starts with passion, it all revolves around passion, and it will evolve with passion, the will to discover and try out new things.

The need to coin a term for his current style emerged over the last few years, during conversations at exhibitions or workshops. It came about naturally: 'Archaic Modernism'. He defines it as an inter-dimensional journey. Which is precisely what his life is all about: a solitary traveller that moves through multiple planes and establishes different connections. Szpajdel's notion of time has always been porous, and part of his success lies in the juxtaposition of modern and ancient or – as per Archaic Modernism – from prehistoric to ultra-modern. Archaic Modernism sums up and contains all the graphic knowledge acquired during the development of his previous new styles. The awareness that the ideal equilibrium comes from temperament; from calm and flowing, to agitated and ragged, and it is more the actual name he gives to his inner self rather than just a logotype style.

3.5 ARTMAZING EYE CANDY

Combination of simplicity and calmness. Combination of simplicity and complexity. Being totally into it, Christophe Szpajdel works on logo design in complete freedom. He manages to free his work from the salary and the market in general. It's pure enjoyment; the pleasure of seeking without defined expectations – like cooking.

A perfect logo is like a meal cooked with flair; it has got to be eye candy. That means readable, catchy, powerful, balanced, flavourful, memorable, making you want to check the band. Some great examples of eye candy logos not made by me are Sarcófago, Mayhem, Darkthrone, Unleashed, Crematory, Demoncy, Thornafire, Satyricon, Dragged into Sunlight.

And if he declares that he would love to live off his art entirely, he adds:

I have still a long way to go, a lot of work to do and improvements to make.

Christophe decorates his daily life creating new words, such as 'cointreauversial' or 'zap'tually', that helps characterise him as someone whose creativity is continuously operating. After 2010, he became fully aware of the stylistic influences that feed him the most, and this moment of self-consciousness came as a breath of fresh air in his creativity. This creativity led to the diversification of his art through the revisiting of Art Nouveau and Art Deco.

I had an extraordinary episode of my life when I turned forty under the Roaring Forties in the Southern Hemisphere. That happened on Milford Sound on September 28th and 29th 2010, then at Doubtful Sound on September 30th. These were places with a magical feel that unlocked my inspiration to flow full stream. I also visited the North Island of New Zealand a few months later in March 2011 Napier and Wellington were the two places that stole my heart.

Christophe had discovered an unexpected source of inspiration in the land of the Maori, and he absorbed it and developed it in the only way he knew: creating logos. After visiting New Zealand in 2010, he managed to get back there in March 2011, and again in September 2013.

How such ancient people as the Maori have adapted to modern Western architecture and combined a very distinctive style such as Maori Deco like you can see in Napier for example.

Everything can be recombined, from the motifs of distant cultures to forest engineering studies, evolving to be useful for a better grasp on nature's anatomy. When he talks about Maori Deco, it is because that's where everything falls back in the semantic field of his imagination.

4.1 ART NOUVEAU

Art Nouveau, the form of art started in the fin de siècle of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century is the very meaning of how nature has been powerful influencing our creativity.

Christophe Szpajdel recalls his interest in Art Nouveau from his early teens.

I also had a fascination for the Art Nouveau ornaments, and it is something that attracted me. It was natural, vegetal.

He defines Art Nouveau as the real, human art of nature – or, vice versa, the true nature of arts and crafts. He sees it as the cultural movement that embodies all the values he stands for. Beauty, elegance, bending, turning, and sensuality; a study of eroticism, and the consequent evocation of mysterious feelings.

It is very organic; lines are not perfectly angular but more rounded. They are also extremely versatile as I can make them grimmer or more depressive or somehow oriented towards Art Deco if using more straight lines. Art Nouveau is incredibly plastic, flexible, and versatile. These logos are so easy to upgrade with additional features like drippings, cobwebs, vines, rottenness or anything like that, making these logos such a wonderful source to work on wispy lines like if they were whiplashed on paper.

Art Nouveau is also remarkably close to my personality and the most influential in black and death metal. It does not take a lot to sharpen an Art Nouveau logo and make it more aggressive, still keeping it feminine and elegant.

These are lessons of nature, distorted by the effects of abstract thought.

Geometrical shapes have been created ... far before the humans appeared.

The human eye has always sought the symmetry that is hidden everywhere in the green interweaving around us.

Symmetry is what makes the balance in a logo. I think some logos can be great and asymmetrical as well, but symmetry is essential.

Traditional Scandinavian bands' logos contain treelike structures, Thor's hammers or Nordic mythology symbols.

A lot of black metal bands have something that enhances the intricate, latent sides of nature.

Trees in winter – blackened and blackening silhouettes that distort any possible symmetry – are also the key to balance itself: the impossible arboreal structure of the heavy metal empire in the shape of a striking logo. The arboreal style Szpajdel is known for is a direct (yet not obvious) interpretation of Art Nouveau. And like for the bony spikes of his classic bold black metal style, the naked branches that deform the letters are following a more profound symmetry.

Sacred geometry already exists in nature, and spiritual people who can communicate with nature are the best people to understand these mechanisms. The design of the Native American dreamcatcher with the netting layout is almost the same as the netting of the seeds of a sunflower; it obeys a certain number of laws defined by nature. Everything appears as it is for a reason. The legacy of the values of Art Nouveau, in the hands of Christophe Szpajdel rather than in the drifts of Laura Ashley's salons, remains influential. The roots of an artistic movement will always continue existing in the multiplication of its products and re-emerge in the most unexpected dimensions.

Have a look at the lettering of Hector Guimard and the border shapes of Victor Horta, Daum/Nancy, Louis Comfort Tiffany, or Louis Sullivan. It is striking how these artists have exalted and developed the cult of nature and turned it into a school of art: Art Nouveau.

I adored how Edward Budd conceived the design of his Burlington Zephyr locomotives; that gave a new push to the ailing railway industry in the late 1920s. Or how Bruce Goff conceived the design of the Boston Avenue Methodist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, or Timothy Pflueger elegantly designed his best work of all times, the Paramount Theatre in San Francisco. Or even the little-known Albert J. Evers who designed the Old Oakland Floral Depot in San Francisco as well as having influenced architects in Lisbon for the Eden Theatre on Lisbon's main avenue. It is in 2007 that I started looking closely at both Art Deco and Art Nouveau designs.

Have you seen such beautiful brand logos like Tropon, for example? I think Art Nouveau and nature are one.

Art Nouveau coincides with the cult of nature – which is demonstrated by architects, painters, and sculptors – more than with nature itself. The cult of nature, as a religion, is determined by the domestication of the land. It introduces the concept of subordination between forces. The dynamism of the elements conditioning human life, which in turn develops structures to control these forces. It prepares the ground for a strategic accumulation of knowledge and therefore, for the birth of the first social infrastructures.

The consequentiality between the cult of nature and the Art Nouveau is evident: Szpajdel has grasped how, behind the floral weaves, and thanks to the forces of influence, man can perceive the grace of divinity, to understand the serpentine linearity which connects the first stylized figurines of a mother goddess to the elegance of Gustav Klimt's female figures. The history of power in art is not surprising to those who know the power of logos.

Thanks to industrialisation, perhaps it's only merit, we have expressed the claim of being alternatives to the natural order of things. We neither dominate nor are dominated but start again from the inorganic and the virtual. We restart from the quiet of a laboratory, or of an

How naive. But in the quiet of the hearth, if like Szpajdel you can contrast alienation with vital creativity, new ideas can arise. Surely new configurations of the concept of nature, along with new graphic gestures, will come to console us. Art Nouveau allows Christophe Szpajdel to *develop different and unexplored directions* in his art.

The vegetal details take possession of every available space, and this suggests to Szpajdel that, while remaining in the semantic field of metal, the artisan's talent applies to every surface.

I also found great inspiration in the visuals of jewellery people were wearing; it is amazing how much you can take in when you walk on the street.

4.2 FLOW

The medieval and heroic fantasy domains were a perfect completion and gave me a natural inspiration.

The medievalist dream exploded by the warrior fantasy sagas was another essential feature of his training. If ocean fairies and giant dragonflies were the visions of Art Nouveau, Vicente Segrelles' dragons and Esteban Maroto's skulls were the concepts of heavy metal. And those dark forests.

Art Nouveau has the characteristics of branches, trees, feelings of suffering, domination upon humanity. It is conveying the inherent forces and power by cataclysmic episodes like storms, earthquakes, floods,

prolonged periods of droughts or floods that regard response to the disequilibrium caused by humanity on the natural ecosystem.

A tragic flow. It's no surprise that Christophe Szpajdel's ecologist consciousness is emerging more and more over time.

I am even fascinated by Luc Schuiten's (Belgian architect) theme 'A Vegetal City'...he is indeed a revival of Art Nouveau.

Schuiten coined the term archiborescence, a kind of architecture that uses living substances like trees and plants as building materials when he writes of what inspired him to create Vegetal City. *To break with everything you know and to conceive a dream of somewhere else, of a different way of living — it's one of the fascinating intellectual ideas you can examine.*

Art Nouveau aimed to make natural what did not have a natural origin. Flourishing palaces or packaging, decadent even in its optimism, and proposing a revolutionary idea that was hypocritical in practice. Schuiten's projects are something more. They are an Art Nouveau trip but also a political statement and, just like good logos do in the lettering, it has consistency and harmony in its flow. With Schuiten and Szpajdel, the Art Nouveau idea acquired some waves of life.

4.3 INTO THE LINE

The life and work of Christophe Szpajdel is the story of a continuous process of reshaping and re-lifting forms, like the life of a sculptor.

I think the curves of Art Nouveau and geometric aesthetics of Art Deco have had a huge contribution in the reshaping and re-lifting of my logos and this is something I am applying in most of my logos. That gives a notion of how I will be distributing the strokes of my letters into a particular logo shape. And eventually, I am first building the shape and how I will fill my letters in a space to make them as harmonious as possible. All the work is with a pencil. Then I am upgrading the letters with spikes, drippings. Those parts can be only done visibly with ink. I first start the logo from the centre and then the far left and right ends, so I have an idea of how big and how much space I have to allocate for each letter. Then I can upgrade and make the whole aspect turn darker.

Art Nouveau is not an artistic movement; it does not reflect a particular scene, nor does it create art for art. It is produced for the market, industrially. But the magic lies in the fact that the very idea of nature is encoded into it, ready to germinate when the right conditions are determined. Art Nouveau is the basis of

a lot of psychedelic logos, and you can see the similarities, even if you compare the Yes logo with some works of Alphonse Mucha or Hector Guimard.

But the idea of nature is a hidden seed, placed to lie like Snow White in a magnificently adorned theca. In the 1960s pop community, dark fluidity was exploding, with graphic designers like Victor Moroso adding vibrancy to Art Nouveau (cut-outs by combining colours from the opposite end of the colour wheel). Or font designer Wes Wilson, inventing a psychedelic font that made the letters look like they were fluctuating. The illegible was coming back just as fast as society's level of complexity was growing up.

Venom, the first black metal band to exist, had their first logo heavily inspired by the psychedelic movement. It was actually in the seventies that began my interest in typography, and that psychedelic/hippie 1970s typography was a revival of the Art Nouveau movement back in the fin de siècle.

Szpajdel finds a thin, clear line under the traces of his biography, a graphic line that connects the bison engraved in the Lascaux caves to his moths.

Pagan metal drew its influences directly from history and outstanding natural beauty and also Art Nouveau. Christophe Szpajdel's tale takes us beyond the immediately understandable.

In the 1980s, the land-marking of territories and controlled areas with illegible graffiti went even further; generating gang wars that made such areas as the Bronx and LA so famous. These kinds of designs had a substantial influence on the whole metal scene as it found itself a sort of identity. Illegible, jagged, aggressive writing that has been used initially with the purpose to intimidate. That bold harmony was a significant incidence in the development of typography in extreme metal, shaping up nowadays' visual scene.

Nowadays, the world of logos is almost entirely digitised. As Daniel van der Velden reminds us ('Crypto Logo Jihad, Black Metal and the Aesthetics of Evil', 2007), the evolution of heavy metal logo finds its maximum freedom, and therefore topicality, in black metal. The illegible black metal logo developed, to some extent, analogously with typographic forms of encryption and secrecy developed for the Internet, such as the so-called CAPTCHA — Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart. CAPTCHA images are word pictures generated without human intervention, which must be retyped by a computer user — for instance when setting up a free email account — to guarantee that this is a person and not a machine, to prevent spam. As such, these word pictures must be practically illegible. The words found in CAPTCHA are often abstract and a meaningless combination of letters. Graphic designer Jeremy Jansen generated thousands of them, including text strings like 'shehell', 'castro', 'blutzn', and 'askednex'. These eerie letter pictures recall black metal bands like Arthimoth, Horna,

Myrkskog, Toxocara, Tsjuder and Xasthur. Those who seek to portray evil resort to signs and symbols that represent evil in its most radical form. Black metal uses them to develop new characters: encrypted word pictures that are illegible and unknowable.

Christophe survives happily in this status quo, and he is still the only one able to affirm new styles in heavy metal.

Some of his depressive logos combine the simple straight lines developed by Bruce Goff with the sinister look of eroded letters, drippings, and shading. It is a sub genre that he named as 'Depresiv'Moderne', and it is an attempt to incorporate modernism with dark ambient. A specific list of artists and bands fits this twist, as he mentioned here and there in interviews given during the Depresiv'Moderne period: Swans, I Shalt Become, Krohm, Velvet Cacoon, Apparitia, Dolorian, Swans, Marblebog and others in this direction. *Born as a contaminated genre, Depresiv'MOderne soon becomes capable of generating propagation in turn. It is the turn of Winterstyl: the Art Nouveau contamination of Depresiv'Moderne that will bring a frozen approach. The Jugendstill suggestion freezes nature, leading to patterns of the wintry feel on gnarled branches, like we can see in the logos design for Northumbria, Nocturnal Degrade, Winter Deluge, Winter's Plague, Season of Sorrow and many others. Winterstyl became one of the most influential styles created by Szpajdel.*

The 'Depressiv'Moderne' style is a result of the merging of Art Deco, depressive dark ambient, and the actual economic depression we are in right now. (2008).

Christophe Szpajdel created two logos for Wolves in the Throne Room. The first based on the instructions of the band, with references such as the Polish band Profanum: letters to be readable, filigree letters and thin curves around the whole scripture.

Innovative and completely refreshing at this time ... I then created a second logo purely based on their music, which is a very tall logo where I developed my very own style that I labelled 'Depressiv'Moderne'. That logo is a much more elusive logo.

And finally, 'Archaic Modernism', as a synthesis of his whole work. Until 2019 he concentrated his speeches on the meaning of the alias Darkening Ligne Claire, coined to begin a path of analysis of his work through his vast archive (physical and mental). In 2020 the moniker – the naming of his triangle – will likely switch to something like Archaic Modernist. Darkening Ligne Claire was the collective curatorial work used to put his biography on a fragmented line. It revealed his photographic eye and his method, which gave Szpajdel the strength necessary to promote a new, useful, synthesis of his work: which is

archaic modernism. The deeply ancient and the futuristic must coexist as in the Shipibo-Conibo ayahuasca ceremony. Or as in the perception of time for Szpajdel.

Art is always about something hidden, and this is the reason why Szpajdel is so motivated in asking us to keep looking around in endless search.

Beyond Horta and Van de Velde, Christophe holds the end of that winding and meandering ligne claire that, like a floral pattern that symbolises the infinite, brings us closer to that 'something hidden' that every artist seeks.